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SUBJECT: Dioxins in Irish Meat Sparks Recall

11. Summary. The Irish agriculture industry has been thrown into a pre-Christmas crisis with the discovery of dioxins in pork, followed by the discovery of dioxins, albeit at significantly lower levels, in beef. Feedstuffs from a single feed-mill were the source of the dioxin and the Irish authorities swiftly traced the feed to identifiable farms which have been isolated. Irish consumers have been advised to destroy pork products purchased since September 1, 12008. However Irish authorities have not issued a recall on beef. A number of countries in the EU and worldwide have advised consumers not to eat Irish pork products. End Summary.

12. On December 6, the Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) ordered the withdrawal and recall from sale of all Irish pork products produced since September 1, 2008. This follows the discovery of the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), indicative of dioxin contamination, in pork-fat during routine food chain monitoring for a range of contaminants.

13. The contamination first came to light December 1, but at that stage was believed to be non-toxic. However, on December 6, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (DAFF) confirmed that further tests showed that the affected pork was indeed toxic. It is reported that the contamination was at levels between 80 and 200 times the safe limits. The public were advised to destroy all pork products purchased since September 1, 2008. This was based on DAFF testing of historic samples which enabled a specific cut-off date.

14. On discovery of the contamination, DAFF immediately started investigating the source of the contaminant. It appears that the feed originated from a single feed mill which recycles bread and uncooked bread dough into a biscuit-type product that makes its way into the feed. There is some suggestion that an industrial-oil, not suitable for human or animal consumption, had been used in the production of the animal-feed. However the feed-mill has explained that this oil is used in machinery maintenance only.

15. Further investigation found that the contaminated feed was used on a total of 47 farms in Ireland. Nine of these farms were pig-producing farms. The remaining 38 farms were cattle (beef, not dairy) farms, with one of those also producing pigs. On December 9, DAFF announced that tests on three of eleven of these beef farms have shown dioxin levels two to three times the permitted level. Tests are continuing on the remaining farms. DAFF has stated that given the low levels of dioxin in the beef there would not be a recall of beef. However all the animals on the farms which have tested positive would be slaughtered and the meat destroyed.

16. Following the announcement of the pork recall, all retail stores in Ireland removed pork and pork products from shop shelves. The European Commission said that twelve EU countries and nine non-EU countries import pork products from Ireland. EU countries affected include the UK, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium, Estonia, France, Portugal and Cyprus. Non-EU countries that have been impacted include the U.S., Japan, Russia,

Singapore, Canada, Switzerland, China (including Hong Kong) and South Korea.

¶7. In 2007, 205,000 metric tons of pork were produced in Ireland. According to trade statistics, just over 90,000 metric tons of fresh, chilled and frozen pork products were exported while an additional 26,000 metric tons of products containing pork were also exported. Of this approximately 1,700 tons of pork products were exported to the U.S. USDA/FSIS has already identified shipments to the U.S. since September 1, 2008 and Post is working with the Irish authorities to further identify sources, production dates and consignees in the U.S.

¶8. The Irish authorities have stated that commercial processing of pork, which has ceased nationwide, will resume as soon as possible. They have assured consumers that any pork delivered to the market will be sourced from animals not fed with contaminated feed and will be labeled as production not affected by the withdrawal order.

¶9. This is the third dioxin-in-feed scandal in recent memory, the two most recent being in Chile and in Belgium. While the Irish Government's decision to instigate a full product recall is being applauded in many circles, others are questioning whether it is a proportionate response given the very low risk to human health.

¶10. Farmer producer groups as well as industry groupings have already called on the Irish government for an emergency compensation fund for the pork industry valued at 400 million (\$500 million). While domestic consumer demand is likely to wane for some time after new production is delivered to market, the Christmas season should see the usual demand for hams. However, demand for Irish pork from Ireland's traditional export markets (such as the U.K.) is likely to

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be met in the short-term by importing pork from other EU suppliers, such as Denmark. Questions are also being raised as to what impact the recall may have on the long-term future of the Irish pork sector, which has already been suffering from production cost difficulties.

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